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Oxtongue Fishing Derby page 4
Tree talk page 12
Snowball returns page 15

Frosty trails
Cold weather didn't slow down hikers from participating in Hike Haliburton, winter edition this past weekend. Pictured, a guided hike at Killara Station saw a full group of eager participants. /TIM YANO staff photographer

Minden Business Group reports on progress

THOMAS SMITH
Journalist

Minden businesses are finding their stride, through the guidance of the Minden Business Working Group.

Joining under the umbrella of the Haliburton County Chamber of Commerce with support from the Haliburton County Development Corporation, nothing can stop the newly formed group's momentum as they navigate next steps for the community.

To a crowded Minden Legion last Wednesday, Feb. 4, the Minden Business Working Group introduced a new executive group, consisting of over 10 business owners from Minden.

The first order of business, presented by Mathew Renda, owner of Boshkung Brewing, says that the focus of the

see MAKING page 12

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Harvey Walker poses with his monochrome portraits at his studio in Carnarvon. /ADAM FRISK staff

Putting a human face on tragedy

ADAM FRISK

Journalist

In a quiet studio where James Taylor usually hums along in the background, local landscape painter Harvey Walker is shifting his focus from pine trees and sunsets to the front lines of the news cycle.

For 15 years, Walker, a fixture in the Haliburton art scene, has built a reputation for his landscapes. But so far this year, his "one-a-week" portrait challenge has taken a somber, political turn. Among the portraits of celebrities, like the late Catherine O'Hara, and political figures, two faces stand out: Renee Good and Alex Pretti, two U.S. citizens killed by federal immigration officers in Minneapolis.

While Walker admits he is "principally a landscape painter," he has dedicated himself to mastering the human form. Unlike a pine tree, where a bit of "fudging" is allowed, a face requires exact precision.

"If I'm painting your face, the tolerance, the percentage of tolerance gets really tight," the artist explained in an interview at his studio in Carnarvon. "But it's about building those seeing muscles."

That discipline had evolved into something more than just a technical exercise. As news of the shootings involving ICE broke, the artist felt compelled to move beyond political figures like Justin Trudeau or Joe Biden. He turned his brushes toward Good and Pretti, individuals whose names have become synonymous with the escalating tensions between ICE agents and civilians.

But for Walker, his monochrome oil paintings aren't about therapy or processing his own "demons." Instead, they are an act of visibility.

"I'm not trying to be a political activist, but at the same time, how can you not look at people like that, who have been shot for no reason whatsoever, and not help to make it a little more visible?" he asked. "Push it up one more step, one more post where somebody's going to look at that and go, 'Yeah, isn't that crazy?'"

Walker said that working in monochrome allows him to strip away the distraction of skin tones and focus on "shape and value." The goal is a "one-to-one connection" with the subject. He explained that a painting is only successful when it captures an emotional resonance.

"My goal is to paint the feeling, not just the facts," he said. "When I look at a painting, and I have to smile because they're smiling, I know I've scored. With Alex and Renee, it's about making that emotional connection visible."

The artist notes that painting recognizable victims of tragedy adds a layer of pressure he doesn't find in his landscape work. While a sunset can be "muddied up" and tossed onto the "burn pile" of failed attempts, the faces of Good and Pretti carry responsibility.

"Everybody knows what Alex looks like now," Walker said. "Two months ago, they didn't. The trade-off is that now it's got to be right."

The painter, who is set to lead a one-day workshop at Fleming College's Haliburton School of Art and Design in July, views his portraits as part of a lifelong pursuit of awareness.

Whether he is teaching seniors at his studio by the lake or painting portraits of newsmakers, Walker's mission remains the same: to see the world as it truly is.

Director of education speaks to new build

EMILY STONEHOUSE

Editor

It's official: the site for the new Outdoor Education and Indigenous Centre is set for the property beside Archie Stouffer School in Minden.

When Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) announced at the end of January that the initiative would be going ahead, many were speculating the exact location of the site, which is slated to be utilized for all grades between Kindergarten and Grade 12.

Wes Hahn, the director of education for TLDSB, confirmed in a phone interview last week that the board will be using a property next to Archie Stouffer, which is already owned by TLDSB, and has been for the past 70 years. "We started working with the township in November of last year," said Hahn, noting the logistics of adding a new build to the site.

Hahn shared that the idea for the site has been in the works for many years. Having come from a different school board that implemented similar initiatives, the director saw a need for the same programming to be utilized at a local level. "It's a part of the culture up here," he said, noting the interest to intertwine outdoor education into the curriculum. "There are kids who don't learn as well in a classroom as they do outside … it just has such great potential."

All programs offered will be aligned with the school curriculum, and the site can be accessed by any educators in TLDSB. When the idea first started forming, Hahn worked with a group of dedicated outdoor educators, who brainstormed the needs and gaps of classrooms, and how offering specific programs could cater to the community. Hahn also noted their dedicated work with an Indigenous team, who offered insight and education around the proposed teachings. "We will be working with that team to really enhance the programming," he confirmed.

In order for the project to move ahead, Hahn noted that the district needed to be financially stable. The funding for the project will be coming from their capital reserve, which differs from the funds dedicated to classrooms and teachers. "They won't give you approval if you are running deficits," he said.

He also noted that engaging MPP Laurie Scott in the process from the early stages was advantageous for moving ahead. "She was a big proponent for making this happen," he said, "and for bringing it to Minden."

Aside from the site being owned by TLDSB, the location was also selected due to its centrality to other schools within the district; which consists of 41 elementary schools and seven secondary schools.

Developers hope to break ground as soon as the snow melts this spring, with an opening date of early 2027. "It will enhance what we already have here," said Hahn in reference to the new offering. "I can't wait to see what it brings to this board."

Ice fishing conditions excellent this season

THOMAS SMITH

Journalist

Skiing, skating, snowboarding, or curling are some of the many offerings of the Haliburton Highlands when the snow flies, but ice fishing is another option for beating the winter blues.

"Ice fishing has become really popular," said local guide Steve Lukacic. "People are looking for stuff to do outside in the winter."

Lukacic has been fishing the waters of Haliburton County for several decades. After returning to Canada from an international music career, the fisherman has been offering guided adventures with Yours Outdoors for the past six years.

Lukacic is a descendant from a line of adventurers, with his great-great grandfather owning a hunting and fishing camp in Haliburton.

With Haliburton County being a multi-seasonal outdoors paradise, Lukacic always knew that ice fishing would be part of his offerings.

Lukacic's prevalence on social media has resulted in him having fans across the globe. Through his online pages, he regularly posts his outdoor adventures, hunting, and outdoor cooking.

Bilingualism has been a huge draw for international clients wanting to experience our Canadian wilderness; something Lukacic excels in.

In recent years, the guide says that he finds that he is getting more international clients than ever. Over the past few weeks, customers have come from Belgium and France for him to take them out.

This year, the conditions for ice fishing are excellent, with the caveat that you need to know what you are looking for when it comes to ice.

"No ice is safe ice," said Lukacic.

If you are new to ice fishing, Lukacic recommends either finding a seasoned guide to take you out for the first time, or go ice fishing with someone that is experienced.

A spud bar is an essential tool when venturing on ice. With every step you take, use the spud bar to test the ice's thickness. If the spud bar breaks through, the ice is too thin.

One tip Lukacic wants to share is to watch snowmobilers and take note of what paths they are travelling. They need decent ice to drive along the lake.

This winter's consistent low temperatures have been a blessing for ice fishers. The onset of cold froze lakes as early as November this year, to the dismay of some duck hunters. While temperatures have been really good for ice conditions, ice can be thinner around the edges of lakes. In larger lakes, the ice is thinner in the middle. Snow acts as an insulator, keeping the water above freezing.

"If you are new to getting on a frozen lake, don't take chances," he said.

This year's winter reminds Lukacic of the winters he experienced as a child; very cold and plenty of snow for adventuring outdoors.

> ***"Ice fishing has become really popular. People are looking for stuff to do outside in the winter."***
>
> — Steve Lukacic, fishing guide

In years past, he recalls not letting clients out on the ice until the end of January. In the last two years, he had clients out ice fishing on New Year's Day and Christmas.

"I would have thought that was impossible," said Lukacic. "With climate change, we are getting the polar vortex much earlier."

Throughout Haliburton County, preference of game fish include walleye, burbot, pike, and perch. Bass are to be avoided when ice fishing. With the bass' nesting season in the spring, a disturbance in the winter can be catastrophic to their populations. Bass are strictly not in season during the winter. If accidentally caught, they need to be immediately released.

"You don't even have time to snap a picture," said Lukacic.

Time is crucial for a fish out of water, especially in freezing conditions. Ice can form in seconds on their eyes, gills, and fins, causing bodily damage or outright killing the fish.

"I love fishing for trout," he said. "They are so fun to fight and they are so delicious."

"I highly recommend eating good, healthy, wild food."

Visitors to the Haliburton Forest are lucky for their expanse of lakes filled with trout to ice fish for. A private wildlife reserve, guests can book adventures with Lukacic online through Yours Outdoors or rent snowmobiles to travel through the reserve. If you book a long enough time slot, Lukacic says that guests can bring their freshly caught trout to Haliburton Forest's restaurant, where a professional chef will cook it while it's fresh.

Lukacic says that folks should stay tuned to his YouTube channel @steveie_funfur where he will be posting a new video he filmed with *Alone* season four winner Jim Baird.

Reservations for Lukacic's guiding services can be made through yoursoutdoors.ca/icefishing. You can also email for booking through info@yoursoutdoors.ca.

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Oxtongue Lake pike derby a reel-y good time

THOMAS SMITH
Journalist

Sara and Keith Winterbottom have been working hard to organize this year's annual Oxtongue pike Derby held on Feb. 21. Parking for the derby will be available at the Blue Spruce Resort with fishers need to be ready for an 8 a.m. start. /submitted

In the far off land of Dwight, our neighbours to the west of Algonquin Highlands, the Winterbottoms are hard at work preparing for the 49th Annual Oxtongue Pike Derby.

Originally started by the Algonquin Snowmobile Club in the 1970s, the fishing derby was originally a general ice fishing event.

This year marks the second year for Sara and Keith Winterbottom, of Winterbottom Tattoo Company, organizing the annual fishing derby.

"It was pretty much going to be cancelled indefinitely," said Keith. "Last year, Sara broke the records for the most money raised, most people fishing, the most everything."

With Sara taking the lead on the pike derby, she was given the records of past participants and winning fishes.

The Winterbottoms have been fishing in the annual derby for years. In the past, both Sara and her daughter, River, have won prizes in the competition.

As a family affair, River will be at the event on a sled selling raffle tickets.

Last year, with around 180 participants, it was the biggest turnout to the derby on record.

"Back in the day, there used to be so many winter carnivals and winter events," said Sara. "Now, nobody is doing anything. Everything is cancelled."

After the ice fishing derby became a family tradition, Sara could not see the event cease to exist. As an avid fisher and outdoorswoman, she has been fishing her whole life. More so after she married Keith, the duo shared their outdoors interests with their daughter, taking her fishing throughout the entire year and going camping.

"I love getting her outside, being adventurous and getting her off the phone," said Sara. "That was a big thing for us with her growing up. Getting outside and being able to do that, she is lucky growing up in this area. Then, she can pass it on to her family too."

With Keith's interest in sledding and showing off his collection, the pike fishing derby was also host to a Sled Show N' Shine event.

"We try to get as many people to bring sleds as we can," said Keith. Visitors to the event can vote for their favourite sleds. Last year, around a dozen sleds came out for the Show N' Shine. With last year's presence, Keith hopes to increase the sled turnout for the event. There are no restrictions for entries and can include vintage, new, and classic sleds.

The first place prize is a gift pack from MBRP, which includes a $400 gift card for parts.

"The main stage setup is right on the sled trail, so it is easy to get there," she said.

There will be donuts, and barbecue available for purchase and music to entertain visitors. Parking is graciously provided by the Blue Spruce Resort. The stage for the event is donated by the Deck and Dock Company.

The derby's weighing station and main activities will be taking place on Feb. 21 at 1215 Oxtongue Lake Road in Algonquin Highlands. The derby starts at 8 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m.

"People are coming to the derby as far as Kingston," said Keith.

Conditions for Oxtongue Lake were rough last year. With slushy ice on the surface, Keith sled across the lake to make clear and accessible trails. With this year's cold, Sara says that conditions are looking highly favourable for the derby.

One of Sara's goals for the derby was setting up a social media presence for the event. With over 300 followers for the Facebook page, the Winterbottoms have seen a growth in attendance with no plans for slowing down their momentum.

Wyatt Black, who appeared in season 10 of the History Channel's *Alone* television show will be the judge for the event. Recently, Black has published his book *Bleeped and Blurred* and will be selling copies of it at the event as well as autographs.

As a competition with cash and prizes, registering for the event and a valid fishing license is needed to participate. The registration fee for adults will be $20 and $10 for those aged 12 and under. Participants will be given a wristband that must be on display during the event.

Keith will have a metal detector onsite to test fish for any tamperings. No cheating of any sort will be tolerated. Only pikes that are caught between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. will be weighed for the event. All garbage that is brought to the lake needs to be taken away with you.

"We are trying to reduce the number of pikes that are in the lake," said Keith. "They are wiping out all the lake trout so we are using this as a conservation method."

Oxtongue Lake is situated along the Oxtongue River. As one of the first lakes in the area to freeze, contestants can fish anywhere on the lake end-to-end. Fishers may walk along the lake, use their sled, or other means for transport. You can only have one line in the water at a time, as enforced by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Participants need to bring their own gear. All fishing methods are accepted. If you are using live bait, please remember to bring your receipt if you have purchased it from a different fishing zone.

Participants can put their pike back in the water if they choose. However, the organizers would like to make it clear that no animal is wasted during the derby. With volunteers that can help you clean the pike, make sure to bring freezer bags and boxes for pike meat.

This year, the pike derby has 55 sponsors supporting the event. There will be prizes for adults from first to fourth place with the biggest fish, and from first to third place for youth aged 12 and under. Random giveaways will also take place for derby participants and there will be something there for everybody.

Sara says that the rush she feels when snowmobiling and the ability to see the natural scenery is a highlight for her.

"It is just a fun filled day of excitement," said Sara. Spectators are welcome to come, enjoy food, and have fun in the event.

Last year's first place winner was Kristy Lupton whose pike weighed in at 10.95 pounds.

"It was nice to see a lady win it all," said Sara with a laugh.

Funds raised from the event goes directly back into the Algonquin Snowmobile Club. The club works diligently throughout the winter maintaining and connecting snowmobilers navigating through Dwight, Oxtongue Lake, and Hillside.

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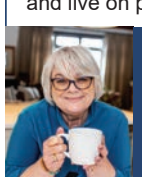

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New photography book celebrates local landscape, artistic legacy

ADAM FRISK
Journalist

Bob and Jean Hilscher's photo is featured on the cover of the forthcoming coffee table book *Oxtongue Inspires: Through the Lens of Local Artists from Algonquin to Lake of Bays.* /submitted

For more than a century, the rugged beauty of Oxtongue Lake and Algonquin Park has inspired some of Canada's most iconic artists. Now, a new professional-grade photography book is poised to demonstrate that the spirit of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven remains alive and well in the digital age.

The project, spearheaded by the Oxtongue Lake for Arts and Culture (OLAC), is the result of a year-long volunteer effort to transition stunning local imagery from social media feeds into a high-quality coffee table book.

The inspiration for the book, *Oxtongue Inspires: Through the Lens of Local Artists from Algonquin to Lake of Bays,* began on the internet, where OLAC members Jan and Chris Woods observed a wealth of talent being shared by local hobbyists and professional photographers.

"My wife was on the internet admiring all of the artists that were doing photographs and posting on social media," Chris explained during a recent telephone interview. "She kept saying to them, 'You know, you should do some cards or do something.' Since they weren't jumping on the bandwagon, we decided to jump on it for them."

Jan explained it was a little difficult to get the artists involved at first.

"They were a little timid," she said. "They're hobbyists, and that's how it started. "They would be posting beautiful photographs on Facebook, and would be commenting on what beautiful pictures they were."

But, from there, the project evolved into a sophisticated collaboration. *Oxtongue Inspires* features the work of 15 photographers, ranging from seasoned professionals to talented amateurs and local artists.

The Oxtongue and Algonquin Park area holds a prestigious place in Canadian art history. While Tom Thomson and A.Y. Jackson famously painted along the Oxtongue River, the project was also spurred by the discovery that A.J. Casson, the youngest member of the Group of Seven, produced more than 30 paintings of the Oxtongue area.

"So it started us on this project promoting the arts, Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, and enhancing the imagery and stories that they have to tell, and to strengthen and highlight the natural environment we live in," Chris explained.

He noted that the Group of Seven's work had influenced how modern photographers capture the famed Ontario landscape.

"There's no question," Chris said. "It's a big cross-section of artists - from animal pictures of moose and loons to unique shots of fungi that people might normally overlook."

Despite its professional finish, the book is a 100 per cent volunteer-run project. The group "lucked into" Linda Pruessen's expertise, a well-known Canadian editor and local cottager. The book was printed entirely in Canada, a decision that the organizers felt was essential, even if it impacted the final price point.

"We decided we wanted it to be printed in Canada; we didn't want to go offshore," Jan explained. "Because we are not-for-profit, all proceeds go right back into our community."

The OLAC has a long history of supporting the region, having previously funded mural paintings, hospital raffles, and outdoor art exhibits.

Oxtongue Inspires is scheduled for an official launch on Canada Day at Oxtongue Lake for $60, with all proceeds supporting OLAC community projects. While formal pre-orders are not currently available, the OLAC is maintaining an "honour system" wait list for those eager to secure a copy. Interested residents can contact the group via email at janwoods2@hotmail.com to have a copy set aside.

points of view

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Fluff

THERE'S BEEN no shortage of news.

Most of it has been bad. We can't look the other way. And the algorithms of our allegedly "smart" devices are curated so that we can't turn it off, even if we try.

In this role, as someone with a soapbox to stand on in our community, I often feel as though I am walking the tightrope of content. How do we share the goings-on in the community, the highs and lows of a small, rural, Canadian town, when it feels like the world around us is burning?

Editorial

Emily Stonehouse

I had a few other editorials drafted this week. Sometimes I simply find it cathartic to get my feelings out in black and white; adding structure and song to the mangle of emotions in my head.

But it was all too dark. I wasn't shedding light on any topics that were necessarily pertinent to our community, and I wasn't fixing any problems by using my soapbox to air out my thoughts.

Now that's not to say that we shouldn't be using our voices when we can. When one voice harmonizes with others in a world where we are told to stay quiet, that's how mountains are moved.

But there is a time and a place.

And during a dreary February day when yet another cold snap is looming and the headlines just keep coming, maybe we need to take a different approach.

It feels useless to write an editorial on what many writers would consider "fluff". Stories on Valentine's Day, on music, on art, on theatre. I myself get swept up in the concept of capturing "news". The big ticket items that will grab the reader and get them thinking. Challenge the politicians at every level to do a better job. Carve open the questions and gut out the guessing games.

But in a world filled with sharp edges and blunt blades, maybe we need the fluff.

It softens us, it heals us. It wraps our wounds and coddles our falls.

So, on this dreary February day, maybe we take a break from the news. Maybe we read about the people who add colour to our community. Perhaps it's the time to take in a musical performance; one of the many added to the roster over the entire month for February Folk Festival. It's officially Olympic season. Cheer on your team, join together in some friendly competition to fly your flag.

There is good in the world. So, so much good. But when we are shaped and carved to only consume the bad, that's what we will look for. The shadows will dominate the light, the edges will overrun the ease.

But we could all use a little bit of fluff. A reminder that love exists, that people are kind, that talent can transport us to a different world, that arts can keep our souls alight.

Because when we fall, when our mental health wavers, our hope dwindles, our belief in a better world falls short, we all need a soft place to land.

The fluffier, the better.

The Humanity

Humans & Technology

Erin Kernohan-Berning

IN JANUARY, Renée Good and Alex Pretti were killed by ICE agents in Minneapolis. On both occasions, videos of the killings circulated widely online. Videos from different angles, slowed down for frame-by-frame analysis, flooded social media feeds and the news. This isn't the first, nor will it be the last time that a tragedy has been frozen in time and become an object of public attention, and symbolic of a moment in history.

In 1972, a photograph known colloquially as *Napalm Girl* was circulated by the Associated Press after a napalm attack on the village of Trang Bàng. The photo depicts numerous children running from the attack including nine-year old Phan Thi Kim Phúc. In the picture she is naked, the napalm having burned her clothes and the skin on her back. The photo became emblematic of the consequences of war and can be found in just about any book or documentary on the Vietnam War.

Kim Phúc, who was the girl in the photo, went through over a year of treatment for her burns. In her adult life, she was eventually able to seek political asylum in Canada. Since then, she has been an advocate for child victims of war and became a member of the Order of Ontario. Her photograph that is now indelibly associated with the Vietnam War affected public opinion about the war at that time. In her life after the photo, Kim Phúc continues to help children impacted by war.

In 2015, a photograph of the lifeless body of two-year old Alan Kurdi went viral on social media. His family was trying to flee Syria, where their city was under siege, and had attempted crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The small boat they were on - overburdened by too many people - capsized, and Alan drowned. Wearing a red t-shirt, blue pants, and Velcro shoes, soaked in sea water and lying face down on a beach in Turkey, Alan became a symbol of the refugee crisis. His photo resulted in, for at least a short period of time, donations to NGOs helping Syrian refugees find help.

Captured moments like these, and others like them, can be difficult to process. There is a conflict between viewing that moment – the disruption or loss of a fellow person's life, the consequent upheaval for the family and friends of those people, the frightening circumstances leading to it – and the relative safety from which you are viewing it. Whether in a newspaper or on your phone, you are partaking in a tragedy you have no physical proximity to, moving on to the next thing in your day while you know that someone else doesn't get to do that. Normalcy starts to make you feel queasy, because now you know that somewhere, for someone, life has ceased to be normal.

Our algorithm powered social media feeds amplify this. Rather than give us time to go through some kind of emotional reckoning with what we've seen, we are simply inundated by the imagery and continuous reaction to it. This is why it's important after this virtual bearing witness to take some time to disconnect. We can't work out what to do with our feelings amidst this constant bombardment. In the immediate confusion and aftermath of a horrible event there is often a lack of information while people directly involved come to grips with what's going on. This vacuum is filled with reaction, conjecture, and conflicting accounts. Taking a moment away from the noise and reminding our minds and bodies that we're not just content consumers but humans that do human things also gives the time and space to be informed when confirmed reports and avenues to help are available.

On February 1, US District Court Judge Fred Biery ordered the release of five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and his father from an ICE detention centre. A bystander's photo of Liam in a blue bunny hat and Spider Man backpack being taken to a salt crusted black SUV on January 20 went viral on social media, leading to a public outcry for his release. This photo was included in Judge Biery's order, rendering it part of the official legal record. Like impactful media before it, Liam's photo will be among those that encompass the events of January 2026.

As we bear witness to events outside of our control, we look for something to help moor us to the reality of a situation that can seem – from a distance – unreal. Photos and videos of these events both provide that tether as well as a distillation of the wide and complex history they are a part of. As much as that role is important, though, it's equally important to remember the humanity of the subjects of those images, as well as our own.

points of view

Judge dread

WHEN JENN invited me to watch the Freeski Slopestyle Olympic event with her, I'll admit that I only did it to be polite.

But it didn't take me long to get into it. Admittedly, I do not have the genetics, youth, talent, discipline, bravery or ability to compete at such an elite level. Or even at a house league level. But, after watching this and other events for a while, I believe that I found a way to participate in high level sports, maybe even at an Olympic level.

I want to judge the figure skating events.

Right now, you are probably saying, "Steve, you don't know the first thing about figure skating."

That's true. But I do know what I like.

Besides, with the consistently high levels of artistic and athletic achievement in Olympic figure skating, it seems to me that you could pick pretty well anyone who did not fall and justify giving them a gold medal. You might even give one to a skater who wiped out, provided you made a passable case for how that wipeout was artistic and well-executed.

Loon Tales

Steve Galea

Look, let's be honest here. Olympic-level figure skating is a joy to watch, but 98 per cent of us have no idea what makes one routine better than the other – aside from a really good wipe out.

My point is that most times the only idea we have about who should win comes from listening to the colour commentators, who usually have an expert ex-skater on the panel. As a judge, I promise you, I would listen to those people too.

I'd also ask other judges questions like: Just curious, what did you think of that?

Again, I don't know much – OK anything – about judging figure skaters. But I do know that if they fall, stumble, or do not smile just the right way at the judges, they should not be in the top three, unless the colour commentators and other judges say so.

Of course, there are always bonus points for a figure skater who is making a comeback from a spectacular, almost career-ending injury or personal tragedy. Who's going to be upset if they get a medal?

Also, you can always screw up and give a medal to someone who really doesn't deserve one. This just adds to the drama and gives the commentators something to talk about for the remainder of the event. Heck, after a while they'll probably come up with a reason as to why the judges made that controversial choice.

The point is, I believe I could be good at this. And, in the summer games I could put my unsubstantiated opinions to good use in that one event where gymnasts run around waving ribbons. The same principles apply.

They're all great. You just have to choose the top three.

I get that I would be a virtual unknown to the figure skating world, but I would argue that I would bring fresh eyes to the event – and a randomness that would only add to the excitement.

I've got great ideas too. For instance, I would also advocate for judges to be able to yell "Cool" and high five the skaters as they pass by. So, there's that.

If they didn't accept me in the figure skating world, I could offer to judge freestyle skiing. But even I realize that's a slippery slope.

pic *of the* past

The Railroad Station in the heart of Haliburton was first built in 1879. 100 years later, it was restored to celebrate it's centennial birthday, and is still used today as the local art gallery. The space is highly iconic and identifiable, and represents the hustle and bustle of days gone by. /FILE

Survivors

MONIKA WAS surprised it was still alive. Weeks had passed and yet the little fish continued to swim around the plants, fairy castle and other fish with a determination that had Monika's admiration. Every night, before going to bed, she would sit and watch the tropical fish in her study. The soft sound of the water pump combined with the watery light that picked up the movements in the aquarium were a soothing way to end the day. With so much chaos in the world, this small piece of uncomplicated calm helped to settle her for the night.

However, when Monika first saw this wounded fish, she thought it was game over for the little guy. Something had obviously happened, leaving it with what looked like internal bleeding and a change in its shape. It was puffy, the colour faded. How she could become upset over something so small had surprised her. And it wasn't the only one.

There was another fish, a different kind, that had been swimming gamely through the underwater scene with its right side paralyzed. Struggling and lopsided, it continued to hang out with its fellows who accepted it despite the obvious flawed, irregular movements. And this had been continuing for many weeks, maybe even months. Monika had lost track of the passage of time. She wondered if tropical fish felt pain.

The fish tank was like a metaphor for life. Every night Monika watched the competition, the apparent alliances and fear. She saw how bigger fish chased smaller ones of its own kind. Some took refuge within the tiny castle, waiting until the coast was clear. And she had also witnessed the way the fish attacked sickly or struggling others, eventually killing them and leaving the bodies for the snails to clean up.

Yet these two imperfect ones continued to swim about, unmolested and determined to fit in. It was a mystery to Monika, sitting there in the dim light, watching. It was as though these fish refused to acknowledge their condition, refused to give in and give up.

Now Monika realized she was projecting an awful lot of human ideas onto creatures half the size of one of her fingers. And perhaps that said more about her than the fish. But she couldn't help but admire the sheer determination, despite the struggle, of these beautiful – if flawed- tiny creatures.

Of course eventually it was time to turn off the aquarium light and go to bed. She could hear the wind outside, bringing in more snow to swirl around the house. In the morning there would be yet more shovelling and more firewood to carry inside and place by the woodstove. It had been a rough winter and not over yet.

She had stopped paying attention to the news, at least temporarily. It was all so brutal and sad. And in the end, she knew the world would survive. It might not be quick, it might not be easy. But like the fish, she would never give up.

Our road Down

Sharon Lynch

HHHS Foundation celebrates community support

The HHHS Foundation is excited to announce that together, our community raised more than $409,000 to strengthen local healthcare during the Believe in the Magic of Giving holiday campaign - this is the true Magic of Giving.

Thank you to everyone who played a part in this record-breaking achievement. *Thank you* for your extraordinary generosity, for your belief in caring for one another, creating a meaningful and lasting impact close to home.

Your donations support life-saving equipment and essential services such as Meals on Wheels, medically necessary transportation, and enhanced care for long-term care residents. Because of you, vital healthcare in the Highlands continues to grow stronger.

A special *Thank you* to Scott Pollard and Suzannah Patmios for their generous matching donation, which inspired so many to give, and to Larry Hewitt of Hawk River Construction for helping us spread the word and amplify our efforts.

For more information please visit our website hhhs.ca/foundation or call us at 705-457-1580

The HHHS Foundation would like to thank this generous and supportive community and wish you a year filled with hope, wellness, and prosperity.

Submitted

Lunch Is On Us – Valentine's Edition

Share the love this Valentine's season at Lunch Is On Us! Join us for a free, nutritious lunch in a warm and welcoming space at the SIRCH Bistro & Bakery, and help us spread the love by wearing red or your favourite "love" colour.

Enjoy great food, friendly faces, and live music by The Highland Breeze.

49 Maple Ave, Haliburton

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. (or while quantities last)

The Valentine-inspired menu includes:

A warm, comforting soup

Two nourishing main options made with care… still to be announced on our Socials.

Lunch Is On Us offers a comforting mid-week break during the long winter months - a place to connect, refuel, and feel supported.

Free for dine-in guests. Donations are welcome but never required.

Need transportation?

Email info@sirch.on.ca or call 705-457-1742.

Follow us on social media for weekly updates.

Submitted

Verse in Harmony in Haliburton

The writers of Haliburton County are plentiful. Storytelling has long been part of the culture here. So it is with great enthusiasm that the Literacy Round Table (Arts Council, Haliburton Highlands) is participating in the February Folk Festival.

The event is called Verse in Harmony, an experimental marriage of music and poetry. Three local musicians (Greg Shantz, Scott Duggan, Marcia Mandel) and three local poets (Lea Harper, Catherine Graham, Janet Trull) will perform at Castle Antiques on Tuesday, February 24. The event is free, but donations will be gratefully accepted.

Starting at noon, we will gather by the stage for conversations about writing and future creative opportunities for the Literary Arts. If you'd like to have lunch or coffee and sweets, patronize the Castle Café or Poquito Loco

From 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., the poets and musicians will perform in pairs. Stay after if you can, to chat and network with the artists.

Submitted

Haliburton Highlands OPP holds youth in policing academy

This interactive program is open to students in Grades 9 to 12 who reside in the Haliburton Highlands area and are interested in learning more about a career in policing. Participants will gain hands-on insight into a variety of policing areas, including general patrol duties, major criminal investigations, canine services, emergency response, forensic identification, and impaired driving investigations.

The academy will be hosted at the Haliburton Highlands OPP Detachment and will run on Wednesday evenings from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., starting March 25, 2026 and concluding April 29, 2026.

If you're considering a future in policing or simply want to learn more about the profession and what the OPP has to offer, this academy could be the perfect opportunity for you.

Applications are available at the Haliburton Highlands OPP Detachment or at the front desk of Haliburton Highlands Secondary School. Applications can be submitted at either location.

The application deadline is March 9, 2026. Successful applicants will be notified by email.

Submitted

Minden Memories

In 1942, a massive fire destroyed the east side of Minden's Main Street from South Water Street to the Newcastle Street intersection. This photo shows the aftermath from the site of today's Rockcliffe Tavern. /Photo courtesy of the Minden Hills Cultural Centre

HALIBURTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Book of the Week

Eighteen-year-old Aine Kamara eagerly awaits a long-anticipated reunion with her older sister, Mbabazi, only to be shaken when Mbabazi arrives with her partner, Achen. In a country where homosexuality is criminalized, Aine must confront her fear for her sister's safety. During a weekend at Aine's girls' boarding school, sisterly bonds deepen and trust grows. A sudden death in the family later brings Achen to the Kamara village, igniting conflict with their mother's Christian faith. As tensions escalate, Aine runs away to Kampala, seeking refuge with her sister and questioning what loyalty and love truly demand.

Everything is Fine Here by Iryn Tushabe is available to borrow from the Haliburton County Public Library. Visit haliburtonlibrary.ca to place a hold or learn more.

Come for the pasta, stay for the playground

EMILY STONEHOUSE

Editor

I hope you're hungry! Members of the parent council from both J.Douglas Hodgson Elementary and Stuart Baker Elementary have joined forces to offer the first official Pasta for Playgrounds fundraiser at the end of the month.

"Physical activity for our children is so important," said Lauren Adelson, the chair for the Stuart Baker council. "And we've been told that the current playground won't last much longer."

Under the school fundraising guidelines as set out by the Ministry of Education, schools are required to fundraise for the purchase, maintenance and replacement of playgrounds. The cost of the newly designed school yard has been estimated at $300,000, including removal of the existing structures, site preparation, installation, and purchase of inclusive and accessible equipment.

In order to make the costs slightly more digestible, the proposed playground has been divided into three phases, starting with a basic playground overhaul, followed by a kinder climber, and then finally, a soccer field. Because they are not able to begin the procurement process until the funds are in place, the price points are the best estimate from the council.

"In the last two years, we've ramped up our more traditional fundraisers," said Adelson, referencing the annual poinsettia sales and food boxes. "But we thought of this as a larger way to get the community involved, and raise awareness around the project."

Adelson hopes that by opening the event to the community; grandparents, neighbours, and family friends can join in on the fun - even if they don't necessarily have a child in the school system currently. "Playing outside is a critical part of our children's physical, social and emotional development. It promotes curiosity, creativity and critical thinking," reads the community invite to the pasta dinner. "Studies have found that children who spend more time playing outdoors have improved learning outcomes and more positive behaviour."

The goal for the playground, which is slotted between the two elementary schools and used daily, is to create a space that everyone can share and enjoy. "The plan is to acquire more accessible equipment for students with different physical and mental abilities," said Adelson.

But parent council is working under a time crunch. With regular maintenance inspections of the site, it's been noted that the expiry date for the current playground is fast approaching. If the equipment is no longer deemed safe, then the students at the schools would go without a play site. "This is something that's so important for our kids," said Adelson. "It's needed."

The Pasta for Playgrounds fundraiser will be hosted at the Haliburton High School cafeteria on Thursday, Feb. 26. There will be two seatings: the first offered from 4:30 to 6 p.m. and the second running from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Tickets at $15 for adults, $10 for kids, and an extra $5 to add meatballs. Proceeds will go directly to the shared project for the schools. Tickets can be purchased at www.haliburtonschoolstore.com.

Broomball heroes

On Jan. 31 Els and Matt Brown hosted the 5th annual Broomball Tournament on Pringle Road. Five teams were pitted against each other in a double elimination bracket. The Rockies captained by Blayne and the Thrashers captained by Gen and Lily faced off in the championship. The game was an intense battle. Back and forth with shots and saves. It went to overtime where Graham of the Thrashers scored top corner to take his team to victory. It was a fun filled event with over 35 people in attendance. The organizers wish to thank all those who participated, and congratulate Gen, Lily, Graham, Gavin, Ross, Tommy and Aubrie on their win. /submitted

Growing up together with Sarah and Connor

EMILY STONEHOUSE

Editor

Life happens fast.

That's something Sarah Comer Dollo and her husband, Connor Dollo certainly know first-hand.

The Minden couple have known each other for years. They attended high school together, but floated amongst different friend groups. It wasn't until Sarah returned to the Haliburton Highlands during the COVID-19 pandemic that the two reunited. "He sent me a message," she laughed, "he was asking me about pilates."

Sarah is the co-owner of the Reform + Restore Wellness Hub, and put pilates on the map when she and Shay Hutchings Dack opened the facility in 2024.

And while she poured her heart and soul into the business, there was a lifelong dream that Sarah always kept in mind. "I knew I wanted to be a mom," she said, "I've had baby fever for a long time."

When Sarah and Connor reconnected in 2022, the pieces started to fall in place. The two immediately clicked; with similar visions around starting a family, building their businesses, and raising children in the area.

"We were married one year after we started dating," Sarah recalled. "We knew we wanted to be together, so we decided to just do it."

It was a small wedding, with Sarah and Connor keeping their special day under wraps. "I didn't want a big wedding," she said. "But we asked permissions from our parents and they said of course, and somehow our wedding party didn't tell anyone, so we only had 40 people."

The two were married at Red Umbrella Inn, honouring their Minden roots and celebrating with close friends and family. At the same time, Sarah's career was picking up steam, and Connor was gaining momentum as a carpenter by trade.

While the couple were sharing a small apartment on Boshkung Lake, they knew they wanted to start to grow their family, so they started the process of house hunting in the area. While getting into the market can be difficult, the stars aligned for them: as soon as they found out an offer had been accepted on the cozy Minden home they had their eyes on, they simultaneously found out they were pregnant. "It just worked out. I always say that was my grandma, pulling some strings up there," said Sarah, referring to her late grandmother, who she pays tributes to regularly.

Sarah and Connor welcomed their first child, Lincoln, in April, 2025. He was born right in their home that they had been diligently working on, with the support from the Haliburton Midwives.

And suddenly, their lives were changed forever. "We really slowed down then," recalled Sarah. "We were just living in the newborn stage together. And we had this common denominator now. You're both equally invested in raising this little person to be a good human."

While Sarah was able to stay home for the first few months before returning to work, she noted that both her and Connor work together to keep the household afloat. "I'd say the roles have been equally distributed," she said. "We both work, so the household stuff is very even."

It's been a noted trend that in the past few decades, the level of involvement from dads has significantly increased. One statistic notes that since 1965, the average time dads spend on childcare has tripled. Some credit flexible careers, prioritizing women in the workplace, or even "the Pandemic Effect", which evened out the mental load substantially between parents.

Sarah noted that Connor is no different. "He's just so present," she said. "He wants to be involved, wants to make sure he's at his best for Lincoln as he grows up."

And in the hustle and bustle of their lives; with both parents returning to work, the couple gives credit to the community they have around them for successfully raising a family together. "We're lucky," said Sarah. "Our moms both live nearby, and they're able to help a lot. It helps so much having family around, having friends. We're able to do this all together."

/submitted

Shedding the past and embracing the present with Barr and Pierre

EMILY STONEHOUSE

Editor

When you know, you know.

Barr Gilmore and Pierre Alexandre lived two very different lives. Pierre was born in Haiti, grew up in the United States, and then spent over two decades in Europe, travelling, performing, and singing on international stages.

Barr has been a lifelong traveller, designer, artist, and teacher. He's earned awards and accolades for his contributions to the arts world, and while he has ties to the West Coast, made the decision to call the Haliburton Highlands 'home'.

So when their worlds overlapped, through pure chance and cosmic timing, they knew it was the universe telling them something. "We really felt that connection," said Barr. "I spent most of my adult life saying I don't believe in marriage, but I felt deep in my soul that Pierre was the one."

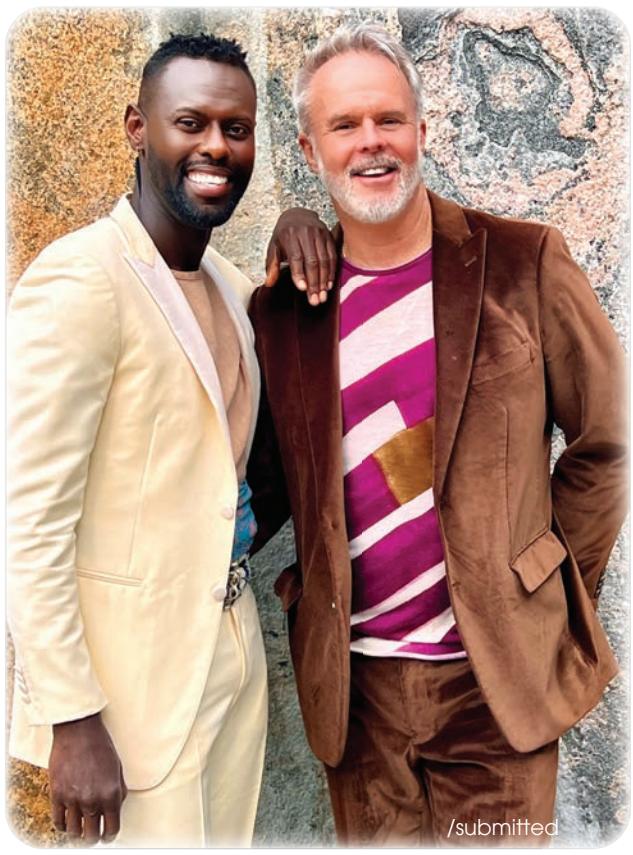
The couple took some time on a snowy Tuesday to touch base with me, and share their love story. Now married for two years, the duo continues to follow their career paths and opportunities to different corners of the world, and joined together via a Zoom call for the interview.

They started at the beginning of their story. "I was in Philadelphia," opened Barr, "working on a book with an artist, and Pierre had just arrived in New Jersey."

"I had decided to move from Amsterdam to be closer to my family," explained Pierre. "And that very first week back, we met through a dating app."

While the two didn't meet in person, they started chatting. "I knew the second I heard his voice," laughed Pierre. "I felt like I really knew who he was just from hearing his voice."

Within a week, Pierre was flying to Canada. Barr had recently returned from his trip to the States, and their first time meeting in person was at the Pearson Airport in Toronto. The couple then spent four days together at


/submitted

Barr's farm in Algonquin Highlands. "So that was our first date," he laughed.

During his time in Haliburton, Pierre was introduced to Dimensions Retreats in Algonquin Highlands, a facility dedicated to personal growth and healing through physical and emotional development. As a massage therapist, Pierre fell in love with the space, and slowly but surely, pieces of his heart started to grow in Haliburton.

The couple went their separate ways, to embark on the original journeys they had set out to do, but before long, they met up again. This time in New York, when Barr was working on a display at the Smithsonian. "And I think that just sort of confirmed a lot for us," said Barr. Before long, they were living together.

"My whole identity changed during the pandemic," shared Pierre. "I was sort of shedding my performance identity, and really going through a soul searching journey."

One element that tied the couple together was the individual deaths of their mothers. At one point, they travelled to Europe together, to spread the ashes of their mothers in places they had requested. A journey that was significant to take solo, but even more meaningful to do together.

"We've both been shedding a lot of old identities," said Barr, noting that physically and emotionally, the couple are committed to changing, to adapting, to growing. "There are a lot of things we are both learning from each other," added Pierre.

While Pierre is spending the winter months working in Toronto to enhance his massage capacities back at Dimensions when the weather warms, he recognizes that Haliburton is now home. "I'm stepping into a different role here," he said. It's completely different. But that identity shift was pretty important to do."

"We're not afraid of change," echoed Barr. "I think that's a part of why we love each other. We love it here in Haliburton, we want to have a base here, but we love to spend time in other places as well."

The couple were married in 2023, under the light of the solar eclipse that wowed the world. "We actually had planned on getting married earlier in the day," chuckled Barr, "but we kept having technical difficulties with video calls, things kept going wrong. So we didn't plan to do it during the eclipse, but just as we said our 'I Dos', it went dark. It just kind of worked out that way."

A total eclipse of the heart, through shadows and light.

Because when you know, you know.

Lifelong friendship and true love with Dave and Betty

EMILY STONEHOUSE
Editor

/EMILY STONEHOUSE staff

To be best friends.

That's the secret to a long and happy marriage, according to Dave and Betty Mills.

The Haliburton-based couple are celebrating 50 years of being best friends. And when they sat down to discuss their story - completing one another's sentences and relishing in days gone by - their friendship was top of mind.

"We're a good team," said Dave, "we just work well together."

"Working together and teamwork is what's always made it work," echoed Betty.

Their story started in 1976. Betty, a Kindergarten teacher, was seeking a job in the Uxbridge area. She heard that there was a school principal, Dave Mills, who may be hiring. Betty tracked Dave down, right to his own home, "and I got an interview on the front lawn," she recalled with a chuckle.

While the meeting may seem serendipitous, Dave recalled that it was a trying time in both their lives. "It was sad, because our marriages were just breaking up," he recalled of both of them navigating the process of divorce in their first marriages. "But we became fast friends. Best friends first."

As time went on, and their prior relationships were far in the rear view mirror, their own dynamic began to blossom. But they knew they needed to be serious. Between the two of them, they shared seven children. "It was so busy," said Betty. "It's hard to remember what it felt like. We had to try to make sure we met the needs of all seven children."

At the same time, both their careers were expanding, with Dave taking on a new school, and Betty growing as a Kindergarten teacher, navigating a number of primary pilot projects for kids between the ages of four and six.

Through the hustle and bustle of parenting and teaching, Dave and Betty made a "spur of the moment" decision to get married. They had a planned trip to visit British Columbia over March Break in 1988, and eloped in Nanaimo during their visit.

After nearly 30 years working with youth, the couple retired; Dave a short three years before Betty.

With Betty's father purchasing a property on Kennisis Lake in 1959, their happy place was always on the lake. The couple purchased the cottage in 1989, and put a house on the land by 1998. And just like that, Haliburton became home.

But a big driving factor in their relationship, through every move and motion, has been the Lion's Club. Dave joined the service club in 1974, and has been a dedicated Lion for 52 years. "I resisted at first because I thought it was something he needed to do on his own," laughed Betty, "but you have such a wonderful social world with the Lions."

And that's not all they do together. The couple are founding members of the Highlands Summer Festival, and have both graced the stage, and dedicated their time, skillsets, and energy to the backstage world, including directing and stage managing major productions. They also both sing in the local choir, support one another's crafts and hobbies, and truly enjoy spending time together. "People often joke that we're attached at the hip," laughed Betty.

When they look back on their 50 years of friendship, they credit communications and respect as their constants. "We don't agree on everything," said Dave, "but we never fight. You have to value each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Dave noted that he's a big picture person, and Betty navigates the numbers. "They say that opposites attract," he chuckled. "Betty is systematic, and I'm a big picture person."

Betty agreed, noting there was nothing she would do differently over the past five decades. They've grown, they've learned, and they've loved one another through every stage. "We used to wonder what it would be like to grow old together," said Dave, reminiscing on their younger days of navigating busy careers, a blended family, and a life that lay ahead of them. "And I have to say, we're still going strong."

Family first with Fraenzi and Jason

EMILY STONEHOUSE
Editor

/submitted

Some would say marriage is like a game. Filled with twists and turns, snakes and ladders. But in the end, you just have to hope there are more ladders than snakes, and you keep rolling the dice.

For Fraenzi and Jason Morissette, their 25 years of marriage has proven that. And through it all, they've had one constant that keeps them tied together: the importance of family.

The couple met in high school, right here in Haliburton. With one year between them, it wasn't until Jason's final year at the school that the two had an opportunity to spend some time together, in the form of an outdoor education program hosted at Camp Wanakita. They hit it off instantly, but with Jason leaving the following fall to attend Nipissing University in North Bay, they knew they had a decision to make. "So we decided to try long distance," recalled Fraenzi.

When it was her time to fly the coop, Fraenzi went to Sudbury to study psychology, before she realized it wasn't for her, and moved to North Bay to pursue nursing.

The couple stayed together throughout their post-secondary years, before returning to the Haliburton Highlands, where their respective families were living. Yet at the time, teaching and nursing jobs were tough to come by, so they had to make another decision for themselves: where to jump into the working world.

Jason opted for Korea, where he taught English as a second language, and Fraenzi purchased a one-way ticket to Switzerland, to stay with her grandparents and work in a nursing home. "It was before the time of cell phones," recalled Jason. "So I would stay up until midnight to talk to him on an old rotary phone," laughed Fraenzi. The two also wrote letters to each other, which Fraenzi has held onto all these years.

While their jobs were taking off in different corners of the world, and they were no strangers to long distance at this point, one significant event changed their lives.

In 1997, Jason's youngest brother, Mike, was hit by a drunk driver. And suddenly, their worlds were tilted in a whole new way. Jason moved back to Haliburton, to be with family, and Fraenzi wasn't far behind. "That's what family is all about," said Jason. "We're here to support one another. That's what we're supposed to do."

As Mike was nursed back to health, the couple went about making their hometowns their forever homes. Jason secured a position at Haliburton Highlands Secondary School, and Fraenzi started working at the local hospital. "There's always something good that comes out of something bad," said Fraenzi, noting their lives suddenly falling into place in Haliburton.

By 2001, the couple were married, with the service at the local Catholic church, and the reception at Camp Wanakita, right back where they started. Within a year, they welcomed their first child, Zach. Two years later, they had Alyssa, and then Chloe, five years after that.

And those were the busy years. "It was the 'fly by the seat of your pants' time," laughed Fraenzi. "But having both sets of our parents here was helpful. We did a lot of divide and conquer."

While all three kids showed talent and interest in extra-curriculars, the couple also committed to being heavily involved in their programs, with Jason coaching Zach's hockey teams and offering leadership within the executive of local sports, and Fraenzi taking on roles in costume management and development with the girls' dance programs. "We always knew that wherever we were, that we would be getting involved in things," said Jason, "no matter where we were."

"We always saw our parents involved in whatever we did, and we really wanted to emulate that for our own kids," agreed Fraenzi.

And while it was busy and chaotic in all the right ways, they agreed that they wouldn't change it for the world. "The memories you have from that are so worth it," said Jason. "You get to watch not only the joy of your own children, but also the joy of other children in these sports."

When they look back on their 25 years of marriage, and the hustle and bustle of parenting three busy kids, they agreed that some of their favourite chapters were the trips they took. "Any of the trips we did with all five of us were really profound trips," said Fraenzi. As a geography teacher, Jason agreed. "I live to explore," he said. "And we really wanted to teach them that there are other places out there."

With the kids all grown and off on their own adventures now, Jason and Fraenzi are reconnecting with bits and pieces of their lives that were once poured into raising their children. "You kind of lose yourself in your kids' lives," said Fraenzi. "But where we are now, understanding that our house is becoming more and more empty, we are looking for hobbies we can do together."

The two look back on their love of travel, their interest in sports, and their desire for quiet time at the lake. "That's truly something we both enjoy," said Jason. "Just being at the lake, and relaxing."

But through it all, family stays as the number one priority in both of their lives. From having the connection to their own parents locally, to ensuring their kids always have a safe place to land and opportunities available, the couple is committed to supporting their family around them. "Family is just so important to us, and we've been lucky," said Jason. "We know we've been blessed to have had the opportunity to raise our family in our amazing hometown, and that has given us so much to be fortunate for."

Making moves in Minden

from page 1

working group is known as the "Minden Triangle."

This geographic area spans from Dairy Queen to the Minden Legion, then across town to the Minden Hills Cultural Centre.

"Minden is a very big community. We can't touch every business, but we are hoping that if we work within a core area where all businesses are concentrated, it will cause a ripple effect throughout the County and the township," said Renda.

Noting that Minden's downtown core is what draws the most visitors to the area, the group hopes that advertising and billboards will push traffic throughout Minden and the rest of the County.

Renda announced that the Minden Business Working Group will soon be making social media pages to showcase the businesses of Minden and collect stories and info on the local businesses.

The group says that they are focusing on 'low hanging fruit' including beautifying the downtown core and increasing the awareness of popular events like the ice races, Rotaryfest, Haliburton County Fair, and Minden Pride.

After Renda's introduction, Jim Ecclestone, with support from the family's company Calstone, called the crowd to action.

Ecclestone, current owner of the Rockcliffe downtown, reported that renovations to the site are going well. He has plans to improve the parking lot and to offer around ten spaces of public parking at the Rockcliffe in the future. On the property, he plans to erect a clocktower, a Minden Moose statue, and a large Adirondack chair for kids to climb and take pictures with.

"[All of the business owners], every one of them is on our side on making a change to downtown Minden," said Ecclestone. "It is very difficult for the town to get anything done, without the owners on our side."'

To improve downtown Minden, Ecclestone has organized with the group to have two intense days of volunteers, contractors, and business wonders working to repair, repair, and restore the glory of downtown Minden. The chosen dates are April 18 and 25.

"I will tell you, I think it is going to be the biggest event to ever happen to Minden," said Ecclestone. "Everyone's going to be out in the street. Everyone will be there. Do you know how proud you all should be."

Members of the newly established Minden Business Working Group pose for a photo on Wednesday, Feb. 4 at the Minden Legion. /THOMAS SMITH staff

Ecclestone also re-confirmed that Calstone will produce Minden Moose statues for those that want them. The Minden Moose mascot will also be available to visit future events to establish itself as an icon for the town of Minden.

There are also plans to host an information centre in Up River Trading where there will be Minden Moose branded swag, a television showing events happening around town, and speciality Minden dollar coins will be minted to be used at participating local businesses.

Ecclestone also mentioned plans to improve the alleyway beside Coneybeare's connecting visitors from Mill Street to Bobcaygeon Road.

The Minden Business Working Group is currently seeking volunteers and contractors wanting to lend their gifts to the beautification event.

For those interested in lending a hand, the group asks you to email them at mindenbusinesswg@gmail.com.

Oh Christmas tree; AH residents weigh in on tree thoughts

THOMAS SMITH

Journalist

This past Christmas, Algonquin Highlands residents were asked what they thought of the newly lit Dorset Community Christmas Tree at Dorset Lions Centennial Park.

The tree that was lit was a healthy white pine, in addition to lighting the previously used tree.

Algonquin Highlands council reported at their meeting held on Thursday, Feb. 5 that of 35 respondents, 22 said that they liked the newly proposed tree.

In correspondence with the council, the Dorset Heritage Committee reported that they were against the proposed white pine.

"If they didn't like the existing tree, take part in the survey," urged Mayor Liz Danielsen. "Make your votes count."

Providing the council with the broken pieces of the former plaque that used to be on display at the Dorset Community Christmas Tree, council agreed to erect a replacement plaque in the future.

Parks, recreation and trails manager Chris Card confirmed that when a white pine grows, there is a good chance that its limbs will spread out and become 'gangly'.

"I think we are okay keeping the new one the way it is and planting a new tree for the future," said Councillor Julia Shortreed.

Danielsen said that she supports the idea of keeping both trees lit to connect with traditions as well as having a new, healthy tree.

Council concluded that for now, their plan is to replace the missing plaque and to light the new white pine tree this Christmas.

In the meantime, Card will investigate where a new tree can be planted and other options to replace the aging Christmas tree. A conversation with the Heritage Committee is expected before deciding on the future of the Dorset Community Christmas Tree.

Township of Algonquin Highlands

NOTICE
Special Council Meetings
2026 BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

TAKE NOTICE that Council will conduct its 2026 budget deliberations during Special Meetings commencing at 9:00 a.m. on the following dates:

- **Monday, February 23, 2026**
- **Tuesday, February 24, 2026**

The meetings will be held in the Council Chambers located at 1123 North Shore Road, Algonquin Highlands.

Members of the Public may also observe Council proceedings by joining a live-stream link. The live-stream link can be found on the meeting Agenda at https://algonquinhighlands.civicweb.net/portal/

Dated this 10th day of February, 2026.

Dawn Newhook, Clerk/Deputy CAO
Township of Algonquin Highlands
1123 North Shore Road
Algonquin Highlands, ON K0M 1S0
T: (705) 489-2379 x333
E: dnewhook@algonquinhighlands.ca

Family Day Open House at Cultural Centre

The Minden Hills Cultural Centre Foundation invites the community to a Family Day Open House on Monday, Feb. 16 from 12 to 2 p.m., offering an afternoon of creativity, learning, and family-friendly activities at the Minden Hills Cultural Centre.

Highlights of the event include hands-on nature-themed arts and crafts at Nature's Place, and a special interpretive program led by local entomologist Basil Conlin. Conlin will bring insect specimen displays and share insights into the relationships between insects, humans, and the environment.

The Agnes Jamieson Gallery will be open for visitors to enjoy an exhibit featuring work from the permanent collection, including André Lapine, as well as new acquisitions. Food will be available on site, with chili and hot dogs generously provided by the Rotary Club of Minden. Visitors are also encouraged to bring skates to enjoy the Dawson Hamilton Outdoor Memorial Rink located in the centre of the Heritage Village, weather permitting.

All activities are suitable for all ages. Admission is by donation, and no preregistration is required. The Cultural Centre is located at 176 Bobcaygeon Road, Minden, and is open year-round from Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Submitted

A hiking we will go

Hikers flocked to all corners of the County over this past weekend, to participate in this year's annual Hike Haliburton, winter edition. While the temperatures were hovering around a major cold warning, participants bundled up and braved the weather to explore guided trails around the Haliburton Highlands. /TIM YANO staff photographer

THE TOWNSHIP OF MINDEN HILLS
IN SEASON, EVERY SEASON

COUNCIL MEETINGS VIRTUAL & IN-PERSON

Council and Closed Session meetings are currently being conducted in-person (Council Chambers, 7 Milne St., Minden) and with electronic participation. The scheduled upcoming meetings are:

February 12 – Regular Council Meeting
February 26 – Regular Council Meeting

Members of the Public are invited to observe Council proceedings by attending in-person or via the live-stream link.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

We are currently recruiting for the following vacancies:
- Parks Summer Students
- Recreation Summer Students
- Cultural Centre Summer Students
- Part-Time Waste Facilities Operator
- Seasonal Waste Disposal Site Attendants

Please visit our website www.mindenhills.ca/careers for more information and how to apply.

S.G. NESBITT MEMORIAL ARENA

- The SG Nesbitt Memorial Arena will be open on Monday February 16th, 2026, for Family Day and has a variety of family friendly activities to check out. Take a look at the Minden Hills events calendar online.

- Come and join the staff at the SG Nesbitt Memorial Arena for the PA Day on Friday February 27, 2026. There is a full day PA Day camp for children 4-12 years old, babysitters course for youth 11-15 years old, and drop in Public Skating, Floor Hockey and Basketball.

MINDEN HILLS CULTURAL CENTRE

- A selection of artwork from the Agnes Jamieson Gallery's permanent collection, as well as new acquisitions, is now on display. The Gallery is open Tuesday to Saturday from 10 am – 4 pm. All are welcome. Admission is by donation.
- Celebrate Lunar New Year at the Minden Hills Cultural Centre on Saturday, February 14 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM with a fun, family-friendly drop-in craft event. Explore traditional Lunar New Year themes through hands-on activities, including Nian legend storytelling, Chinese calligraphy, firecracker crafts, and a special Year of the Horse craft. All are welcome. Admission is by donation. No registration required.

For information on all the programs and exhibits offered at the Minden Hills Cultural Centre: culturalcentre@mindenhills.ca or call 705-286-3763.

FAMILY DAY HOURS OF OPERATION

The following Township of Minden Hills offices will be closed on Monday, February 16, 2026 to celebrate Family Day:
- Municipal Administration Office (7 Milne St.)
- Fire Hall Administration Office (12418 Hwy. 35)

The following facilities are open:
- S.G. Nesbitt Memorial Arena will operate 8:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m. with activities
- Minden Hills Cultural Centre will operate 12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. with activities
- All waste disposal sites will be open and will operate on Sunday hours.

Our offices and facilities will resume regular hours on Tuesday, February 17, 2026.

STRATEGIC PLAN – PRIORITIZATION ONLINE SURVEY

Your voice matters in Minden Hills, and we need your input. This is your opportunity to share what matters to you as well as helping to guide community priorities for the years to come. The online survey will be available for input until Friday, February 27, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. Visit our website to link to the survey at www.mindenhills.ca.

Questions? Please email admin@mindenhills.ca or call 705-286-1260 ext. 527.

NOTICE: ADOPTION OF 2026 WATER AND WASTEWATER RATE BUDGET AND BY-LAWS

Please take notice that Council of the Corporation of the Township of Minden Hills will consider adopting Water and Wastewater Rate By-laws related to the 2026 Municipal Budget. This notice is to also advise all Utility Customers of the new rates which came into effect January 1, 2026 for the 2026 billing year:

- **Water — $3.62** per cubic meter (Min. amount **$148.42** or **$593.68** per year for < 41m³)
- **Wastewater — $4.50** per cubic meter (Min. amount of **$211.50** or **$846.00** per year for < 47m³)
- **Total Minimum Charge — $359.92** per quarter = **$1,439.68** annually
- **Lutterworth — $331.35** per quarter or **$1,325.40** per year

By-laws will be reviewed for adoption on Thursday, February 12, 2026 at 9:00 AM during its Regular Meeting of Council located at 7 Milne Street, Minden ON.

The proposed By-laws to be considered are as follows:

- By-law 26-18 Water Rates – Lutterworth
- By-law 26-19 Water Rates – Minden
- By-law 26-20 Wastewater Rates - Minden

Members of the Public wishing to observe Council proceedings may do so by attending in person or watching electronically via the **live-stream link, available at the top of the Agenda located on the Minden Hills CivicWeb Portal at** https://mindenhills.civicweb.net/Portal/ .

Dated this 5th day of February 2026.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Zach Drinkwalter, Director of Finance/Treasurer
705-286-1260 ext. 504
zdrinkwalter@mindenhills.ca

SAFE WINTER DRIVING

When a winter storm is expected, all municipalities have a plan. Drivers need to have their own plan. It is important to delay unnecessary travel during significant storms to give plows time to do their jobs. It's also safer for drivers.

Shine up your dancing shoes

Dance Happens Here Haliburton hosted a community square dancing night on Saturday at the Haliburton Legion, with Hannah Shira Naiman guiding the guests through a night of dancing and music. The busy event saw dancers of all ages and abilities enjoying the community experience. /ADAM FRISK staff

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Never a dull moment for OPP officers

THOMAS SMITH

Journalist

Every police officer's journey to their career is different.

For some, it is a draw from their family's lineage. For others, it is about self improvement.

For local officers like Hillary Newman, it was about helping others and making her community a better, safer place.

"I wanted to be a police officer from an early age. I did not have any family members or friends in policing as a child so I spent a lot of time learning about the profession and working in adjacent roles to build my skills before applying," said Newman. "I also liked the challenge of the role and the fact that there are so many different opportunities within the Ontario Provincial Police."

Prior to Newman's career as a frontline police officer, she worked for the Ontario Public Service, then at the Provincial Police Academy as a civilian member.

For the past three years, she has been on the frontlines of Haliburton County.

"As an officer in Haliburton, I am a trained breath technician, which means that I am qualified to perform breath tests in impaired driving investigations. I'm also the local media officer and a member of the Provincial Liaison Team," said Newman.

With new growth of our local OPP detachment, Newman has taken on a coaching role for a new recruit.

"I still have not quite figured out exactly where I would like my career to go, however, I have been enjoying my time in Haliburton County learning and contributing to the broader community and meeting unique and interesting people from across the county," said Newman.

She says that she feels excitement in her job every day.

"I like that every day is different," said Newman. "There are many different opportunities within the OPP to explore different areas of expertise within the profession."

For a typical frontline officer in Haliburton County, OPP officers work 12-hour shifts, either during the day or night. Officers share duties between proactive patrols , responding to calls, participating in community engagement, or administrative tasks.

With the local OPP detachment covering over 5,000 kilometres of area, Newman says a large chunk of her shift is getting around to all the different areas of the County.

Other duties of officers include property checks, RIDE programs, foot patrolling, criminal investigations, attending court, and liaising with other community agencies.

"Day to day, we respond to calls for service which could range from motor vehicle collisions, impaired driving investigations, situations of intimate partner violence, break and enters, thefts, frauds, death investigations, disputes and almost anything else you could think of," said Newman. "We don't really know what most days will look like until we get there; which can be both exciting and challenging."

Some more specific roles that OPP members can have may involve court administration, mental health, traffic, street crime, and abuse issues. Some of the unique qualifications you can get as an OPP member include Breath Technician, Scenes of Crime Officer, Marine Officer, ATV or Motorized Snow Vehicle Operator, and Commercial Vehicle Trained Officers.

A new effort from the OPP is to attract more women and gender-diverse members to their team.

"The OPP hosts interactive 'Bound' events periodically and throughout the province to support individuals who are interested in becoming police officers. OPP Bound, Women's Edition is dedicated to women (including those who are cis, trans, assigned female at birth and non-binary) and the unique challenges they face when considering a career in policing," writes an OPP news release.

For someone wanting to become a member of the OPP's team, Newman recommends keeping an eye on the their website. Their social media accounts also regularly post guides on how to pursue a career in policing.

If you are a woman, or someone that is gender-diverse, you are heavily encouraged by the OPP to visit one of their recruitment events.

"The career is fulfilling to me because I get to help people. Some days are really challenging and tough, but I find a strong sense of pride when I touch base with people weeks or months later and they tell me about positive changes they've seen in their lives or the lives of other people following an interaction with police," said Newman.

> ***"We don't really know what most days will look like until we get there; which can be both exciting and challenging."***
>
> — Hillary Newman, Provincial Constable
> Haliburton Highlands OPP

"Now I know that all of the interactions are not positive and that does weigh on me, however, I feel eager to come to work and continue to develop my skills to be able to provide support when people need it. Every person and situation I have dealt with is different and challenges me in a new way. I am grateful for those experiences and being able to support the community in any way I can."

Like many professions, being a police officer can be very challenging and demanding, says Newman.

"I am also a mother and sometimes that role feels just as difficult. We all face our own challenges and we all need support at different times and in different ways," said Newman. "I would say that there is support in the policing community, and that many organizations including the OPP have made some really positive changes in terms of supports available to members."

Stay tuned for future recruitment opportunities through their Instagram @ontarioprovincialpolice.

Strategic Plan – prioritization survey

Your voice matters in Minden Hills and we need your input.

The Township of Minden Hills is working with Karen Jones Consulting Inc. on developing our Strategic Plan. We are moving to the next phase in gathering input with an online Prioritization Survey. This is your opportunity to share what matters to you as well as helping to guide community priorities for the years to come.

Your participation will refine what we have heard, as well will help build a strong and informed plan. Share your thoughts! The online survey will be available for input until Friday, February 27, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.

On-line Survey: www.surveymonkey.com/r/Minden

Note, we will have paper copies available at our facilities Arena, Cultural Centre, Municipal Office and the Scotch Line Landfill. These paper surveys need to be returned to us by Monday, February 23, 2026 at 4 p.m. to be included in the process. Should you have any questions about the Strategic Plan Process and/or the Prioritization Survey please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your support as we complete the process towards developing a Strategic Plan for Minden Hills.

Submitted

Bundle up for Dorset Winter Carnival

THOMAS SMITH

Journalist

Everyone's favourite mid-winter festival is fast approaching.

Luckily this year's Snowball Parade falls on Valentine's weekend. It is the perfect day to spend with your family, friends and loved ones.

To kick off the celebration for the weekend, all are invited to visit the Dorset Ice Palace for skating on Friday, Feb. 13 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Enjoy a beautiful winter evening skating with other festival goers.

Entry to the activities require a donation of $5. In exchange, you will receive a Dorset Snowball commemorative button. Visit once and you'll be hooked. It is a source of pride to display decades of Snowball buttons.

A pancake breakfast starts off Saturday's festivities, happening at the Dorset Recreation Centre from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Be sure to check out the annual Snowball Parade that begins at 10:30 a.m. The parade procession walks along main street with costumes and uniquely decorated floats for all to enjoy.

Once the parade finishes, there will be a kickoff to the Dorset Snowball by the crier along with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

A hockey shoot out event will be taking place at 11:30 a.m. at the Dorset Ice Palace. Pre-registration and helmets are mandatory for participants.

Cardboard toboggan races will be held on the hill of Centennial Lions Park. Pre-registration and helmets are mandatory for all participants.

One of the most popular events of the Snowball is the Great Canadian Lumber Jack Shows, Chad Ingram, communications coordinator for Algonquin Highlands has confirmed that the lumberjack shows are returning this year. The lumberjack displays will be housed at the Dorset Recreation Centre's parking lot and performances will be at 11 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.

For animal lovers, there will be Eyrie Birds of Prey Shows at 11:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.

The newest addition to the Snowball's itinerary is a colouring contest. The colouring page features an adorable snowman skating. The contest is open to children aged 10 and under with pages available both online and in-person at the Dorset Recreation Centre. Decorated pages will be judged on the day of the event.

For the hockey lover in your family, the Dorset Hounds will be facing Lake of Bays at 6 p.m. at the Dorset Ice Palace.

"I like how community based it is," said Ingram. The Dorset Snowball Winter Carnival is the perfect excuse to get out of your house and shake off any cobwebs that are building up.

Throughout Saturday, visitors to Snowball can enjoy warming up by a campfire, going for horse-drawn wagon rides, running through an inflatable maze, a woodcarver, local wildlife expert Steve Morrin, and a variety of vendors.

Food will be available for purchase at the Snowball with Snowflake Cocoa and Pretzel Bar, Touch of Love Food Truck, the Lion's Club, and a bake sale on-site for visitors.

To warm up, there will be face painting and games inside the Dorset Recreation Centre and the Dorset Heritage Centre will be open.

Beloved to everyone that has visited, the Snowball remains a tradition for all generations of your family to enjoy. This year marks the 34th Snowball event and the event gets bigger and better every year.

Tales and trails

The annual Poker Run was held this past weekend at Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve. The event raised We raised $16,500.00 for the fire department, and saw 585 participants. First place for the day was awarded to Lauren Glass of Newmarket, who was gifted a brand new sled. Second place went to Tanya Rempel, who earned a helmet and snowmobile suit, and third went to Scott Collins, who won a helmet. /TIM YANO staff photographer

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Huskies Hockey

Huskies Hockey

In a very exciting game, the Haliburton County Huskies dominated on Saturday in Minden against Burlington. The team saw plenty of local support, and showed the fans how to win, pulling out an impressive 7-4 score against the visiting team. /TIM YANO staff photographer

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	6							3
							5	
					8	3		6
6	9	1						
	5			8			4	
		9		5	1			
	7						8	

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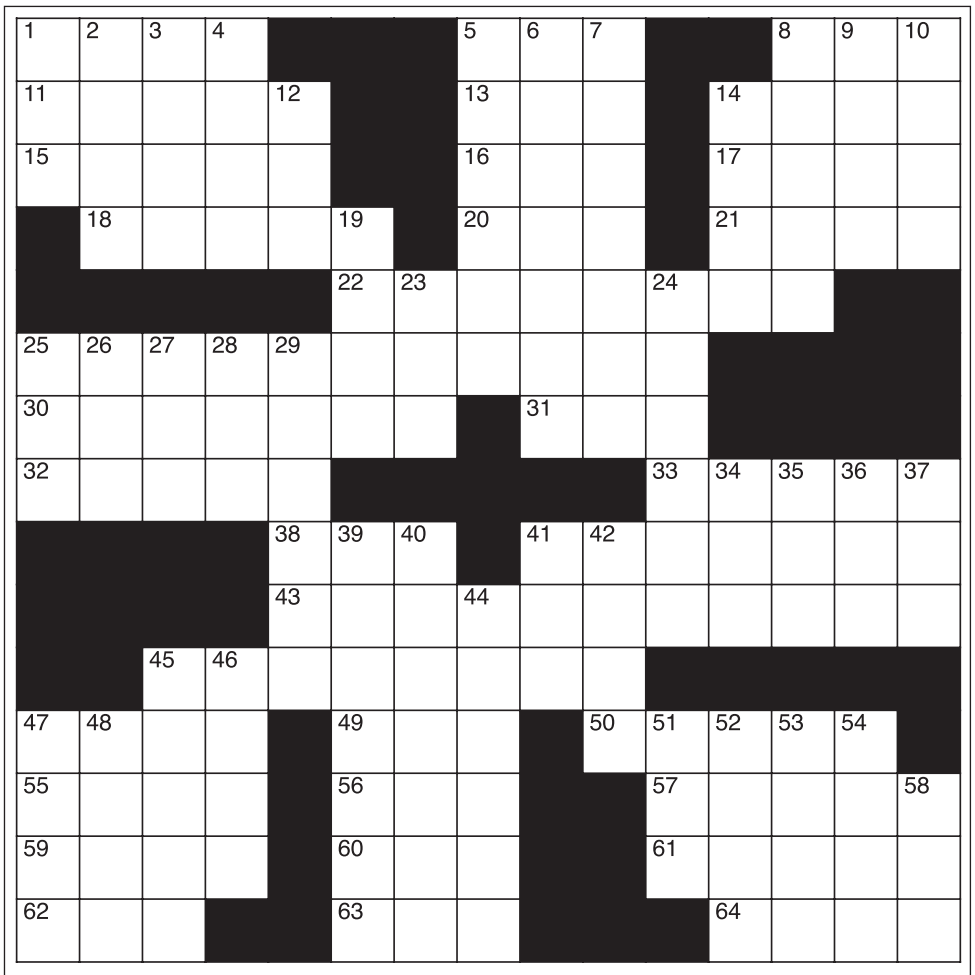
Answers on page 22



CLUES ACROSS
1. Breezed through
5. Consumer protection agency
8. Criminal syndicate
11. Moves back from
13. Satisfaction
14. Feel concern or interest
15. Monetary units
16. Congressman (abbr.)
17. Israeli city
18. Restaurants
20. 2,000 lbs.
21. Grandmother
22. North, South and Central
25. In an early way
30. Foes
31. Social networking platform
32. Early term for basketball player
33. Another name for sesame plant
38. Disallow
41. Provide greater detail
43. Inaccessible
45. Evoke emotions
47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
49. Celtic punk rockers
50. A fencing sword
55. Actor Idris
56. Affirmative (slang)
57. Afflicted in mind or body
59. One point north of northeast
60. Born of
61. Social media hand gesture
62. Hong Kong food stall __ pai dong
63. Opposite of beginning
64. Email function

CLUES DOWN
1. Sign language
2. Fashionable
3. Borough in Helsinki
4. Inability to hear
5. More quickly
6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
7. Shrewdly
8. Rooney and Kate are two
9. Mediterranean port
10. Benedictine monk
12. Midway between south and southeast
14. Town in Galilee
19. Satisfy
23. Mice genus
24. Brass instrument
25. Chest muscle (slang)
26. Transmits genetic information from DNA
27. Records electric currents generated by the brain
28. Woman (French)
29. Short route aircraft
34. Pitching statistic
35. Pointed end of a pen
36. Popular sports league
37. Body part
39. Inoffensive
40. Yellowish cotton cloth
41. Feline
42. Does not tell the truth
44. Seduced
45. Spiritual leader
46. Abba __, Israeli politician
47. Repair
48. Olive genus
51. Swiss river
52. Prejudice
53. C. European river
54. Keep under control
58. Father

Answers on page 22

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Please submit a resume and cover letter, preferably via email, no later than 4:00 pm on Monday February 23, 2026, to the attention of the Human Resources Manager – Municipality of Dysart et al – hr@dysartetal.ca
P.O. Box 389, Haliburton, Ontario K0M 1S0

We thank all of those who apply, but only those selected for an interview will be contacted. Accommodation for applicants with disabilities will be provided upon request. The Municipality of Dysart et al is an equal opportunity employer. Personal information is collected in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and will be used only for employment purposes.

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OBITUARIES

In Loving Memory of

Ingrid Krause

Ingrid Krause, of Haliburton County passed away suddenly, Saturday, January 31st, at the age of 84. Leaving behind a life rooted in love, patience, and quiet strength.

Ingrid was a devoted mother to Babette (Rob), Claudia and Ralf (Jen), a cherished grandmother to Trevor, Cassandra (Paulie) and Alyssa (Tim), Brandon, Aaron, Eric, Cailyn, Kiera, Christian and Hayley and a proud great-grandmother to Nate, Cali, Juniper. Ingrid is survived by her sisters Brunhild and Gisela as well as nieces and nephews: Petra, Andrea, Micheal, Svenja, Simon, Fabian (and extended family). Her family was the center of her world, and her love showed up in a thousand small, steady ways listening, caring, and always being present.

She was also a passionate gardener. Ingrid found joy with her hands in the soil, nurturing life from the ground up. Her gardens were reflections of who she was: thoughtful, resilient, and beautiful in their simplicity. Many will remember her surrounded by flowers, tending carefully, finding peace outdoors.

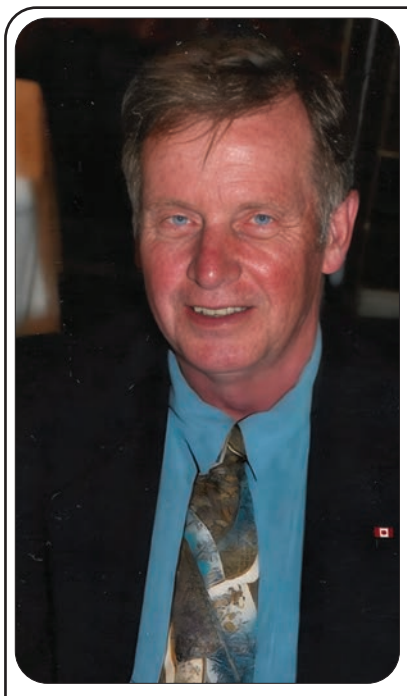
Ingrid's legacy lives on through the generations she helped raise, the values she passed down, and the quiet kindness she shared with everyone who knew her. She will be deeply missed and lovingly remembered.

It was Ingrid's wish for cremation and a celebration of her life to take place at a later date.

Memorial Donations to Basil on behalf of Haliburton Micro Meadows would be appreciated by the family and can be e-transferred to haliburtonmm@gmail.com.

Arrangements entrusted through the Gordon A. Monk Funeral Home Ltd., P.O. Box 427, Minden, Ontario K0M 2K0.

www.gordonmonkfuneralhome.com



Gerald Taylor

Gerald passed away with his wife Gloria of 59 ½ years, his twin brother John (Karen), and long-time friends John and June at his side. Gerald will be especially missed by Heather, who considered him her second father. He was predeceased by his parents, Jack and Maisie, and older brother Lawrence. He will be fondly remembered by his many nephews, nieces, extended family, and friends.

Private Funeral Arrangements

Cremation has taken place. As per Gerald's wishes, there will be no public visitation or funeral. A private celebration of life with family and friends will be held at a later date. As an expression of sympathy, donations to HHHS Foundation – Hyland Crest Long Term Care or Parkinson Society Canada would be appreciated by the family. Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the **HALIBURTON COMMUNITY FUNERAL HOME**, 13523 Hwy #118, Haliburton, ON K0M 1S0 (705) 457-9209.

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A Special Heart

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...ders say I Love You to that ...someone... pages 21 & 22

THE HALIBURTON COUNTY
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Barber report says councils can trim up to $1.25-million

by PETER DOWNS
Staff Reporter

There's "no compelling justification" for Haliburton County to restructure its government system, says a consultant, who believes municipal politicians can slash at least $1.25-million from their spending.

By increasing their efficiency and sharing more services, municipalities should be able to convince the province there's no advantage to them amalgamating, says David Barber.

The county paid Barber's consulting company $15,000 to examine each municipality's financial books in a line-by-line search for savings.

After a county report ruled against moving to a one-tier system, politicians wanted an outside specialist to help determine whether they could justify maintaining two levels of government.

Last week Barber delivered his report at a meeting attended by nearly all members of the county's 10 municipal councils.

"The whole thrust of this (provincial) government is to see that services are delivered more efficiently," he reminded the politicians. "One of the chief ways they want to do that is through amalgamating municipalities ... In this study I believe we've come up with another option."

Barber recommends the county's two-tier system — 10 municipal councils and a county council — stay intact. But he says they should become more interdependent, cutting duplication where possible and sharing more services.

He also suggests that municipalities can greatly reduce their costs by setting common levels of spending — benchmarks — for all major functions and striving to meet them.

If councils stick to the benchmarks Barber's report sets for road maintenance, general government expenditures and other costs, they could save up to $1.25-million, he said.

And if they develop benchmarks for all of their expeditures, municipalities should be able to reduce their spending even further.

"There are some really siginificant savings to be had here," he said.

Barber selected spending benchmarks by looking at how much it cost each municipality to perform various functions and setting a level slightly higher than the lowest price for each service.

For example, the report found municipalities spent between $80 per household (in Dysart) and $450 per household (in

See BENCHMARKS page 4

SNOW FUN!

The Snowfest activities on Head Lake during the weekend, attracted hundreds of snowmobilers, but it was also very much a family affair. At left, snowmobilers line up to test their speed on the radar run while above, two-year-old Victoria Etheridge of Maple Lake wishes she could take a run at it too. More photos page 8

Hospital cuts are twice the amount expected

by MARTHA PERKINS
Editor

As it begins planning for its next fiscal year, the healthcare board is going to have to cope with a grant cut which is twice as big as expected.

Foster Loucks, the executive director of Haliburton Highlands Health Services, was notified last week that the Ministry of Health was reducing its grant by 5.3%. Based on correspondence last spring, when the hospitals fell under the jurisdiction of St. Joseph's Health Centre in Peterborough, the board had thought the grant cut would be 2.5%.

On a budget of $2.16-million to run both the Haliburton and Minden Hospitals, that means a reduction of $130,000.

> "It will up the ante a lot on what we can retain in services," Foster Loucks says

"Those are real dollars that come off the top," says Loucks. "It will up the ante a lot on what we can retain in services. It will obviously put more pressure on us."

Compared to larger hospitals such as St. Joseph's, which suffered a cut of 8%, and Ross Memorial Hospital at 6%, the 5.3% reduction doesn't seem as bad "but 5.3% on a small budget is still very difficult to accommodate."

There are opportunities to make up the loss by generating revenue locally, but Loucks says "there's only so much other revenue you can generate."

Asked to give an example of what $130,000 means to the hospitals' budgets, Loucks says that with an average wage of $35,000 a year, it's the equivalent of four staff positions.

At the recent HHHS board meeting, chairman Hugh Nichol stressed how imperative it was to start construction on the new facilities as early as possible. Running two small sites makes it very difficult to realize any economies of scale, he said, and the new facilities will help to alleviate some of the board's financial stress.

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